

Gilmore: Retreat No Option for Defending Liberty



British Prime Minister Arthur Neville Chamberlain signing the Munich Treaty as Adolf Hitler's Secretary Martin Bormann (R) looked on, Sept. 29, 1938 - Munich, Germany The Munich Treaty authorized Hitler to annex a Czech territory, the Sudetenland. Germany invaded Czechoslovakia March 15, 1939. (AFP Photo/France Presse Voir via Getty Images)

By James S. Gilmore, III | Wednesday, 12 March 2025 06:01 PM EDT

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OPINION

Retreat, Appeasement Are Intolerable Options for Defending Liberty - Anywhere

Globally, freedom is under attack.

As we witness a rapid escalation of global authoritarianism, attacks against democracy, economic uncertainties and the spread of deadly diseases, American leadership has never been more important.

Now is the time to stand firm and ensure a prosperous future for all.

If we waver on our global responsibilities to uplift freedom and eradicate terror, those threats will find their way to our allies and our shores.

As the U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I represented America's interests among 57 countries from Europe, Central Asia and North America.

The OSCE's focus is maintaining security around the world; I know firsthand a safe and stable world does not exist without America at the table.

Our allies look to us for guidance, strength and resolve against any enemy of peace.

My message to my fellow Americans is simple: wake up!

We are already in another "Cold War" with authoritarian regimes who seek to destroy the democratic values we cherish so deeply — and oftentimes take for granted.

The decisions we make today will create the world of tomorrow. If we remain on this course of abandoning foreign assistance, that world will be run by China and our adversaries.

We Americans need to know that foreign aid is not just charity or to further the interests of other countries but a way of enhancing America's national security and influence within the international community.

Building up our soft power is an asset.

With U.S. Aid programs, we are building good will and admiration for the United States around the world.

Businessmen know that goodwill is an asset particularly in any commercial transaction and that we should continue to build that goodwill through these modest international assistance programs.

There is a critical balance between soft power and military might, which includes diplomacy, international aid and economic development.

Making smart decisions around foreign investments can and will improve our own geopolitical position.

There is already a [disturbing downward trend](#) of democracy around the world.

Global freedom declined for 18th consecutive years and now only [20%](#) of the world's population lives in a "free" country. In a time where individuals who can fairly exercise their voting rights, voice their opinions, and practice their choice of religion are already in the minority — we cannot retreat further.

We know full well our adversaries like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are ready to take advantage of any gaps left by the U.S.

Over the past 15 years, Chinese development initiatives have exploded by [525%](#), expanding their influence across the world to the most vulnerable regions.

In countries like Cambodia and Nepal, China is already [capitalizing on our absence](#), compromising our strategic position and dismantling our reputation as a force of good.

In Colombia, China has already [expressed interest](#) in bankrolling non-governmental organizations that previously relied on funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Last September, Beijing [hosted](#) a summit on China-Africa cooperation, during which Chinese leader Xi Jinping pledged \$50 billion to support economic development and infrastructure improvements in Africa over the next three years.

Just a few weeks ago, China and South Korea [sent](#) \$4 million to the Africa Centres for Disease Control to address the healthcare funding gap left by the U.S. aid freeze.

The importance of American foreign assistance cannot be overstated.

We would be wise to remember President Ronald Reagan's first [inaugural address](#), Jan. 5, 1967, in which he cautioned that freedom is "never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation . . . "

Because when we are not fighting, China is.

Past presidents like Reagan have proven we can strengthen economic partnerships, advance democratic values and provide life-saving resources to the world's most vulnerable populations — without military conflict.

We can stop threats before they reach us, from terrorist activities to deadly diseases to illicit substances.

If we don't, we will find ourselves deploying American troops to address issues that we could have solved at their onset, contained before they spread or prevented before they began.

By investing in a stable international order now, we can protect American servicemen and women from future harm.

This is smart investing, not just funneling out American resources.

[Less than one percent](#) of the federal budget is required to sustain these crucial international aid programs — and the return on investment is immeasurable.

Without America's voice, democracy will lose and authoritarianism will win.

That's not a world we can live in.

James S. Gilmore, III served as U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from 2019 to 2021 under President Donald Trump. He also served as the 68th Governor of Virginia from 1998 to 2002.